

Book Reviews

Islands of Empire: Pop Culture and U.S. Power. By Camilla Fojas. Austin: University of Texas, 2014. ix + 238 pp. Illustrated. Notes. Works Cited. Index. \$55.00 cloth

In *Islands of Empire: Pop Culture and U.S. Power*, Camilla Fojas offers a compelling analysis of U.S. imperial desires in the afterlife of the Spanish American War (1898). A historical juncture in which the United States violently pulled former Spanish colonies and other sovereign island kingdoms into its imperial orbit, the post-1898 moment is a pivotal era as it provided a foundation for U.S. imperial encroachment into the Pacific and Caribbean well into the twentieth century. Drawing upon a cultural archive of American films, Fojas is particularly interested in the ways in which popular cinematic texts contribute to the consolidation of an “insular” U.S. empire or an “island frontier” (p. 5), vis-à-vis the literal, imagined, and/or sentimental incorporation of the Philippines, Cuba, Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and Guam into the U.S. nation. Careful to emphasize the unique portrayals of each of these islands within contemporary U.S. cinema, Fojas, nevertheless, is concerned with how the moving image sutures each island to the militarized making of the United States. For Fojas, mainstream cinema is an ideological apparatus or a “soft” form of power that (re)produces and normalizes a hegemonic discourse of American liberty, democracy, and free-enterprise capitalism. Subsequently, popular culture becomes a rich site to read and “decode” the American “imperial unconscious” (p. 12).

Conversing with recent scholarship that engages with the intertwining of U.S. militarism and tourism across the Pacific, such as Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez’s *Securing Paradise*, *Islands of Empire* is organized in the following manner. Bookended by an introduction and afterword, each chapter (five, total) discusses cinematic representations of current, former, or proto-U.S. colonies, including the Philippines, Cuba, Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and Guam. In chapter one, Fojas describes the representations of Filipinos as “foreign domestics,” or quasi-Americanized subjects who remain on the fringe of the U.S. nation-state. Contextualizing the emergence of World War II U.S. cinema in relation-

ship to Hollywood's relationship with the U.S. military, Fojas elaborates upon the carefully wrought images of Filipinos, as they oscillate between foreign and familiar in films such as *They Were Expendable* (1945). In chapter two, Fojas shifts her attention to Cuba, a different kind of U.S. territory. Existing just beyond the explicit status of U.S. colony, Cuba remained a U.S. protectorate and tourist destination until the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959). Grounding her analysis of exilic filmic works such as *Cuba* (1979) and *The Lost City* (2005) through the framework of imperial mourning, Fojas explores how Cuba is longingly visualized as a “lost piece of the United States territory” (p. 71). A chapter that would have benefited from a differentiation between imperial mourning and melancholia, this chapter still provides an intriguing glimpse into a corpus of films that, perhaps, will garner more public scrutiny given the current thawing of U.S.-Cuban formal relations. In chapter three, Fojas elaborates upon the ushering of Hawai‘i into the U.S. nation-state. Centering her analysis of films such as *Blue Hawaii* (1961), *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966), and *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961) upon the liberal discourse of multiculturalism, Fojas is interested in how popular depictions of Hawai‘i exemplify a future American melting pot by transforming youthful rebellion, interracial romance, and other “nonmainstream desires” into productive pursuits. Continuing on the discursive un/making of the proper American subject, Chapter Four fleshes out the homogenous projection of Puerto Ricans on the movie screen. As an unincorporated U.S. territory, Puerto Rico remains in political limbo, as Puerto Ricans are given certain U.S. privileges *and* are encoded as “improper” subjects in need of disciplining (p. 133). Engaging with films such as *West Side Story* (1961)—a work centering on the racialized conflicts between two rival gangs, the Puerto Rican Sharks and the Anglo Jets—Fojas speaks to the perpetual depiction of Puerto Ricans as uneasy sources of unrest and racial disorder in urban America. Finally, in chapter five, Fojas offers a discussion of yet another unincorporated U.S. territory, one that remains obscured from the purview of the popular filmic gaze: Guam. Paradoxically, this absent presence (or present absence) of Guam within the American public imaginary is informed by the hypervisible militarization of the island, as it remains a “prime location for the projection of [U.S.] imperial strategy and status” (p. 170). Offering readings of *No Man is an Island* (1962) and *Max Havoc: Curse of the Dragon* (2004), Fojas traces the enmeshment of Guam in the intersecting histories of Japanese and U.S. imperialisms, or what Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho refer to as the transpacific alliance. For Fojas, cinematic works such as *No Man is an Island* solidify the mythologized view of the U.S. Navy as a liberating savior that rescues Guam from the evil grasp of the Japanese empire, transforming Guamanians and the Chamorro into faithful wards of the state.

Overall, Fojas' *Islands of Empire* is a welcomed contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on empire building across the Pacific, Oceania, and Caribbean. Yet, the book could have also offered a more robust analysis of spectatorship practices and U.S. settler colonialism, especially as the latter extends beyond the binary of the colonized/colonizer and "white American/native." Perhaps, in her most conspicuous omission, Fojas gestures to the possibility of spectatorship throughout her book, as the audience holds the "potential power and agency" (p.35) to decode, even disidentify, with the dominant messaging of mainstream cinematic works. However, Fojas' filmic readings reify a single interpretation of the visual text: a work that ultimately replicates hegemonic relations. Hence, ruminating upon recent works with film history, such as Hye Seung Chung's *Hollywood Asian* (2006) and Laura Isabel Serna's *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture before the Golden Age* (2014)—both which consider subaltern interpretations of classical Hollywood films among gendered and racialized cinema-goers—several questions emerge. First, even as these films remain within the dominant Hollywood cinema, how might spectators offer heterogeneous interpretations that do not necessarily abide by the fixed binary of dominant/oppressed? Simultaneously, as spectators occupy heterogeneous subject-positions and share complex relations with the moving image, how might they destabilize the notion that cinema can *only* serve as a tool of cultural imperialism? Despite these oversights, *Islands of Empire* is a carefully researched and insightful addition to ethnic studies and cultural studies scholarship.

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Islanders in the Empire: Filipino and Puerto Rican Laborers in Hawai'i. By JoAnna Poblete. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. x + 227 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrated. Index. \$55.00 cloth

JoAnna Poblete's *Islanders in the Empire* is a richly detailed account documenting the lives of Filipino and Puerto Rican laborers in Hawai'i under U.S. imperialism during the early twentieth century. A comparative analysis on labor and migration, Poblete describes the ways in which citizenship was experienced by both Filipinos and Puerto Ricans, who were neither citizens nor foreigners, based on what she refers to as their "ambiguous political-legal status" (p. 2). To analyze this relationship more critically, Poblete coins the